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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000213

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS AND DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/28/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MASS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: CHILD SOLDIERS IN SRI LANKA: DEMARCHE DELIVERED

REF: STATE 19505

Classified By: MBASSADOR ROBERT O. BLAKE, JR. REASONS: 1.4(b, d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On February 28, Ambassador delivered to Sri Lankan Minister of Foreign Affairs Rohitha Bogollagama reftel demarche on the possible restriction of U.S. Foreign Military Financing to the Government of Sri Lanka, due to the recruitment and use of child soldiers by government-backed armed groups (i.e., the TMVP). Bogollagama reiterated the GSL zero tolerance policy on child soldiers, but questioned the U.S. contention that the TMVP is a government-supported group. Ambassador responded that cooperation between the GSL and TMVP is well-known, and that the GSL is responsible for enforcing its own zero tolerance policy on all territory it controls. The Minister agreed and undertook to ensure that the GSL responds constructively to the US request. Bogollagama and his staff asked how long the GSL has to take remedial measures before the FMF restriction takes effect. Post would appreciate guidance on this. Ambassador also provided the same points to Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights Mahinda Samarasinghe, who explained the activities of an inter-ministerial committee on child soldiers that he had appointed. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Bogollagama was accompanied by Ambassador Sarala Fernando, Consultant to the Minister on Multilateral Affairs; Ravi Aryasinha, Director General Public Communications; and Rodney Perera, Director General Western Hemisphere. Ambassador was accompanied by Poloff Bateman.

¶3. (SBU) Ambassador reviewed reftel points with Minister Bogollogama, adding on a personal note that the GSL no longer has any operational need for the TMVP (formerly Karuna Group) in the east, now that the military has liberated the east. Rather, the TMVP has become an irritant to GSL relations with the U.S., UN, and other countries not only because of the child soldier issue, but also the TMVP's continuing illegal activities such as theft of international NGO supplies in the east, extortion and other illegal actions. He said the GSL clearly had the goal to turn the TMVP into a political entity. Some of the TMVP cadres could enter the political realm, others could be demobilized and receive vocational training, but all should be disarmed and the GSL must attach a particular priority to demobilizing the TMVP child

soldiers, and prevent future recruitment.

¶4. (U) Bogollagama responded by reiterating the GSL policy of "zero tolerance" on the abduction, recruitment, and use of child soldiers. He then challenged the potential restrictions on FMF by contesting the USG contention that the TMVP is a "government-supported armed group". Ambassador responded that the UN had concluded that the GSL supports the TMVP and the USG agrees. He noted that the Sri Lankan military had cooperated closely with the TMVP in the liberation of the east. To this day, many TMVP camps were located right next to Sri Lankan military installations. Furthermore the Government's own police had refused to stop illegal activities by TMVP because TMVP activities were beyond their authority and handled by the Defense Ministry in Colombo.

¶5. (SBU) Bogollagama cited a GSL-sponsored committee on child soldiers that recently found that no cases of child recruitment had been reported to law enforcement officials in the east. Ambassador responded that this claim is not credible. He explained he had met on numerous occasions with the Defense Secretary to share numerous reports by international NGOs of TMVP looting of INGO warehouses in the east. When the NGOs sought to report such cases to the police in the east, the police responded that they did not have the authority to stop the TMVP, and advised the NGOs to talk to the Defense Secretary. Therefore, the GSL should not be surprised if residents in the east do not report incidents of child recruitment by the TMVP to police in the east. Ambassador strongly urged the Foreign Ministry instead to work closely with the UN to establish accurate figures on child abduction, and recruitment since the UN were reliable

COLOMBO 00000213 002 OF 002

and credible interlocutors. The Minister agreed and undertook to ensure that the GSL responds constructively to the US request.

¶6. (U) Bogollagama and his staff raised one important question the Ambassador could not answer: how long does the GSL have to take remedial measures before the FMF restriction takes effect? Post would appreciate guidance on that question.

¶7. (U) Immediately following the above meeting, Ambassador, accompanied by Poloff Bateman, met with Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights Mahinda Samarasinghe. His ministry helped form the Committee to Inquire into Allegations of Abduction and Recruitment of Children for Use in Armed Conflict (an inter-ministerial committee appointed under the chairmanship of the Secretary of Justice in August 2007), thus has some jurisdiction over this matter. Ambassador commended the creation of the committee, and asked Samarasinghe for his cooperation to fix the TMVP child soldier problem.

¶8. (U) Samarasinghe provided Ambassador with the committee's terms of reference, as well as a recent Aide Memoire submitted to the UNSC Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The memoire highlights the GSL's zero tolerance policy and its efforts to "prevent further abductions and recruitment, secure the release of children already being kept by armed groups, rehabilitate such children and reintegrate them back to society." In reference to the report of the UN Secretary General on Sri Lanka, the memo claims that abuses attributed in the report to the LTTE, Karuna Faction (TMVP), and elements of the security forces "are already under investigation by law enforcement and other relevant authorities" - and pledges to take action against perpetrators. The memo also points to the inter-ministerial committee's recent fact-finding mission to the east, where it examined 47 affidavits that Ambassador Allan Rock (Special Advisor to the Special Representative to the UN Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict) had received and subsequently given to Samarasinghe. Samarasinghe highlighted

that 37 of the 47 children have been located and returned home, while 10 cases remain outstanding. Regarding rehabilitation and reintegration, the Secretary of Justice is also the Commissioner General for Rehabilitation, thus combining the law enforcement and rehabilitation sides of the issue. The memo states that there are currently state run rehabilitation centers at Palkekele and Jaffna, and preparations are underway for opening three other centers in Ambepussa, Welikanda and Karainagar.

19. (C) COMMENT: Bogollagama's attempt to deny direct GSL support for the TMVP reflects the GSL's standard response, which is not credible as the Ambassador told the Minister directly. Post will follow up with the Secretary of Justice who heads the GSL's Committee on Child Soldiers to learn more about the committee's action plan and impress upon them the need for action. The Ambassador will also double-track the points with Defense Secretary Rajapaksa who has worked closely with the TMVP, and his brother Basil, who is responsible for developing the east.

BLAKE